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# The cultural diversity as a phenomenon of the multicultural society

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## Abstract

The paper focuses on basic characteristics of multiculturalism and various means of solving multicultural problems in the global world of the 21 century. Multicultural society can be described by shared space and culture in particular places. It can create various benefits, but on the other hand, also problems and threats. The phenomenon of the multicultural society is inevitably cultural diversity. The paper brings the research which compares cultural variety in Germany and the Czech Republic and tries to find possible solutions the problems which can arise in any multicultural society and thus can bring new solutions to current problems.

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## 1. Current multicultural world

The current world is more and more both culturally and technologically. The consequences of globalization can be found in many spheres of everyday life. International migration is very strong and this trend will continue. The current world can be characterized by local and global problems. Thanks to technical equipment we know what is going on all over the world. The coexistence of various cultures and races in multicultural society is not simple and brings many questions and needs appropriate solutions (Pikhart 2012).

The concept of an intercultural or multicultural society first appeared in Switzerland in 1957 and in Germany in the late 1980s. A multicultural society is made up of different nations, cultures, origins, religions, races and languages. Unfortunately, the concept of an intercultural society is too often assimilated with an ideal unattainable in reality. The reason is the that the coexistence of a large number of different cultures in such a society

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essentially increases the risk of conflicts because of cultural misunderstanding and rejection. The traditional conservative policy often tries to ignore these features of a multicultural society.

Current world is different, various and complicated. The Austrian and British philosopher of the XX century K. R. Popper speaks about a closed and open society (K. R. Popper, 1994). Giovanni Sartori considers good society to be pluralistic and based on mutual tolerance. It seems that current multicultural society does not mean development of pluralism but its denial. Multiculturalism does not want differentiated integration (Sartori, 2011). Tolerance and pluralism are two different concepts, even if they are mutually connected. Tolerance respects the values of other people; pluralism promotes its own value. Pluralism states that various opinions will bring positive values for the individual and society. Currently we can speak about two versions of multiculturalism, i.e. multiculturalism which is influenced by pluralism and the second version of multiculturalism which is ant pluralistic. Pluralism and multiculturalism are not contrary concepts. Multiculturalism can be understood as the existence of various cultures and thus it is just a configuration of pluralism (Welsch, 2002).

We can see the huge volume of immigrants from Africa and the Near East to Europe, and movement of masses of people within Europe. Migration will definitely continue. How to integrate these immigrants to the majority society? What is our attitude towards them? How to be ready for future problems there may arise? There are many potential problems, political, cultural, ethical and we have to find solutions.

The German Chancellor A. Merkel and the British Prime Minister have recently announced that the European concept of multiculturalism has failed. What are the further steps for us? Multiculturalism could be able to solve the coexistence of the groups with various culture, religion, ethics, etc.

## **2. Cultural diversity as a phenomenon of the current era**

Multicultural society is characterised by meeting various cultures, nations, languages and religions. The immigrants come to the new country equipped with their own habits and culture. Immigrants are not the people who come temporarily or commute because of their work. Immigrants are individuals or groups who leave their own country with the aim of living permanently somewhere else.

When a person wants to live in another country, they usually prepare for such a new experience. It is necessary to learn the new language and be aware of the history, politics and culture of the new country. Everything new is usually cold, dangerous, threatening (Maletzke, 1996).

People of various cultures meet with each other and have to deal with each other, with new situations and experiences. Culture is multifaceted, dynamic and various. Original meaning of the word culture comes from the Latin word *colere* which meant looking after as in agriculture, i.e. looking after the field. The word has changed its meaning many times. Culture can be understood as a synonym for sharing the ideas about the world. In all groups and human races there are various viewpoints of the world and life. It is very difficult to find exact barriers between particular cultures (Eriksen, 2007). Culture and cultural identity have become in the course of centuries an important political tool.

Intercultural communication means the social interaction of different cultures. These cultures can be represented by both individuals and organisations, social groups, schools, associations, societies and even states. Culture is a set of factors giving a sense and value to human coexistence in a society. It includes religion, social and cultural values, art, education and science. Culture and social development influence each other. However, people often have a lot of prejudices and stereotypes (Weig, Mensing, 1997). Just knowledge of cultural distinctions facilitates intercultural communication.

It is not difficult to leave our own secure place and position, i.e. home and family, and go somewhere new and strange. How can we understand different and new? Meeting the otherness can be a challenge for us. Waldenfels (1990) speaks about the otherness and our experience with it and also the issues of dialogue.

Immigration brings something new and unknown, something we do not know but it is very current. One of the most important issues of the current era is religion. Islam has become crucial for several million of Muslims in Europe. The values of Islam, such as liberty, equality, rights of women are different from what we know as the European culture. The differences are so big that it is difficult for us to understand them (Kelek, 2012). What will it mean for all the members of the multicultural society we live in? The debate of religion and chaos of cultures is more and more present everywhere.

### 3. Multicultural society in the Czech Republic and Germany

Multicultural situation is very different in various parts of the world. In the Czech Republic it is rather calm than in other countries in Europe. The number of inhabitants is 10,500,000. Legally registered are 441,500 foreigners. Every 25th inhabitant is a foreigner. So the number of immigrants is much lower than in other European countries. From 2001 to 2008 we could see the increase in the number of foreigners. Three quarters of the foreigners are Slovaks, Ukrainians and Vietnamese. The biggest problem is the Roma community, which has always been a very sensitive issue.

The situation in the nearby Germany is much more complicated, which is caused by the huge wave of immigrants. Germany has become a multicultural country since there are 15 million people with certain immigration background, i.e. one fifth of the all inhabitants. There have been many problems connected to this situation, e.g. the educational system was not ready for such a situation. There are many schools with the number of immigrants counting more than 80%. The most important issue is communication problems between the parents and the teachers, but also many social problems leading to misunderstanding and clashes and finally higher crime rate. There are 917 so called "Tafeln" (boards) which try to solve the problems. It is a charity, non-governmental organization. The clients will get food there but also can spend free time there. Now the institution has 60,000 employees and 3,000 contact places (Der Spiegel, Nr. 52). We can find them in small and big towns.

In the Czech Republic, as well as in other European countries, such as Germany, Slovakia or Austria, the foreign (English) language begins being taught at the age of 8 (3 years of primary school). A second foreign language is optional. The development of an intercultural society necessitates the upbringing of its members as citizens of the world able to speak the languages of other people to establish mutual understanding.

### 4. Conclusion

Johann Amos Comenius claimed that we live in the stage of one big world and whatever happens there is important for everyone who lives here. The current situation in Europe is concerning all people who live here. The issue of immigration has several solutions. The immigrants can assimilate or keep their own identity. It is important to solve the problem. The solution can be mutual tolerance. It is necessary to look for a compromise when a minority will accept the language of the majority and respects the necessity of elementary education in the primary school in this language. It causes the creation of bilingualism which finally leads to variety and plurality. It is crucial to understand that life in a multicultural society does not mean that one culture is better than another one. The openness, mutual respect and tolerance can lead to better coexistence of people in any multicultural society.

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